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SUBJECT: ADRIATIC CHARTER DEFENSE MINISTERIAL BILATERAL
MEETINGS WITH CROATIAN OFFICIALS

Classified By: Poloff Justin Friedman, reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) The U.S. delegation to the Adriatic Charter (A3) Defense Ministerial, led by Ambassador Frank, met with the State Secretary of the Croatian Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 24 January 2005 and the Minister of Defense of Croatia on 25 January 2005. Mr. Alan Van Egmond, OSD Director of Balkans and Eurasia Programs, led the for the Department of Defense in both meetings. Subjects covered included NATO accession, various topics on defense reform, the Croatian political situation and its affect on Croatia's campaign for NATO membership, regional security and stability in South East Europe, an Article 98 Agreement, furthering Croatia's participation in international peacekeeping operations in Afghanistan, and possible new non-military contributions to Iraq. END SUMMARY

MFA STATE SECRETARY BISCEVIC

2. (SBU) The meeting with State Secretary Hidajet Biscevic (a rumored candidate to replace outgoing FM Miomir Zuzul) took place at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Croatian Ambassador to the US, Neven Jurica, also attended. Biscevic began by saying that he was ready to discuss all issues and would brief the delegation on bilateral relations, especially in the area of possible peacekeeping roles for Croatia with NATO. Mr. Van Egmond opened by stating that the United States believes that Croatia belongs in NATO and that Croatia can help the alliance. He continued that the USG will be focusing on the next few months for assistance as a decision will most likely be made on the next round of any expansion of NATO in early 2006. Within this short timeline, he expressed that there is not a lot of time for slippage in Croatian reform efforts. Van Egmond noted that Croatia's most recent Annual National Program (ANP) received positive reviews. While urging Croatia to continue with necessary regional cooperation, he commended Croatia on the pursuit of regional leadership roles in the Adriatic Charter (A3) and the Southeastern Europe Defense Ministerial (SEDM).

3. (SBU) Mr. Van Egmond repeated the Istanbul Communique - that NATO will assess each country on its own merits in deciding whether or not to admit a new member. He remarked that there is concern that with the recent political turbulence some defense reform issues could be affected. After the Bilateral Defense Consultation to be held in Croatia in the early summer, there will only be a few months left to work on full achievement of Croatia's Partnership Goals.

4. (SBU) Biscevic appreciated the candid assessment of Croatia's current situation with regards to a potential NATO decision and the support of the USG in that process. While expressing hope that with the passing of "election fever" a working context could be created, Biscevic observed that a hectic EU agenda will divert much of the government's energy. However, He stated that within the next 4-6 months there has to be a clearer picture and that once there is a normalized situation Croatia can focus more on NATO. In the meantime, the political framework in Croatia is oriented to keep NATO accession preparation going. Importantly, he submitted that because the discussion on NATO has not yet been accompanied by an educated public awareness campaign, that a positive public relations drive would start in a couple of weeks.

5. (SBU) On regional Cooperation, Biscevic remarked that A3 participation is "very, very important" and that Croatia now accepts and promotes the regional aspect of the A3. He believes that the A3 will lead to greater stability in South East Europe and that given the political situation in some neighboring countries, the A3 will have a role in helping.

6. (SBU) Mr. Van Egmond then raised several items for discussion: NATO/EU tension in Croatia, an Article 98 agreement, and the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI).

7. (SBU) Addressing the sometimes seeming tension between

Croatia's paths to accession in the EU and NATO, he affirmed that the two organizations are partners. A good example is the recent transition from SFOR to EURFOR in Bosnia. This process was characterized with good cooperation and hard work

by both sides.

18. (C) On a possible Article 98 agreement, Mr. Van Egmond noted that this is a tough bilateral issue to grapple with as it binds our hands as far as providing training and security assistance is concerned. Informing the State Secretary that there are some new ways to get these types of agreements done, because of Croatia's re-engagement on this topic, the USG will begin looking at new avenues of approach.

19. (SBU) Relating to PSI, Van Egmond was appreciative of the support that Croatia has given. He noted that as Croatia has already shown a proactive way to interdict, increased cooperation through activities is something that will increase our bilateral relationship as well as make the region more secure. One possible way to increase Croatia's counter-proliferation efforts is through USG assistance under the International Counter-proliferation Program (ICP). As this money is not barred by the absence of an Article 98 agreement, that help is available.

110. (SBU) State Secretary Biscevic stated Croatia's belief in the compatibility of the EU and NATO. He said Croatia understands that there must be more done on NATO awareness. According to Biscevic, on PSI, Croatia would like to be very active. The government is about to nominate a PSI coordinator and will undertake a review of bilateral agreements with the United States to improve the strategic framework. He stated that Croatia is ready to participate in PSI exercises, particularly the upcoming exercises in Spain and Portugal, and that within PSI and the greater topic of border control, the Adriatic Charter gives an opportunity for cooperation. He also re-iterated the Croatian goal of signing a ship-boarding agreement with the United States. On the subject of regional cooperation on counter-proliferation, Biscevic announced the recent signing of bilateral agreements with Serbia and Montenegro and Bosnia-Herzegovina on the exchange of classified information. The agreements, he explained, are important for further cooperation on Hague Tribunal indictments and border security. Additionally, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina will undertake discussions on the delineation of their shared border.

111. (C) Biscevic then spoke to Article 98 and the Croatian desire to re-engage on this issue. Biscevic related that in the post-election mood, promising new avenues could be opened on this issue. The MFA is proposing to have a Croatian legal team come to Washington for further discussions. The Croatians would like private, expert level discussions.

112. (SBU) Croatia would like to expand their cooperation on Iraq. In addition to proposals to train Iraqi government and civil administrative workers, Biscevic asserted that Croatia would be ready to help with structuring the development of administration. The idea is to invite 10-20 Iraqis for education and training in Croatia. Biscevic also mentioned that Croatia has some military equipment available for donation. He also mentioned that some Croatian demining companies had approached the government and inquired about contract possibilities in Croatia. Finally, Biscevic was pleased to announce that Croatia is sending a few election observers to Iraq. These were all, in Croatia's view, concrete, pragmatic measures to continue dialogue.

113. (SBU) Mr. Van Egmond agreed that engagement needed on Iraq is not purely military in nature. Training is needed and we have to address requirements like demining. However, maybe Croatia will be interested in the intermediate possibilities of further cooperation like the UN protection mission. He stressed that it is important to the U.S. that Croatia is looking to increase cooperation in a post-election Iraq. The proposed forensics cooperation will be a good start. This forensics capacity can be a niche capability.

114. (SBU) On Afghanistan, Van Egmond thanked Biscevic for Croatia's recent deployment to a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT). He noted that Secretary Rumsfeld is aware that Prime Minister Sanader did take action on his request for Croatia to engage on PRTs. Van Egmond then inquired whether Croatia could expand cooperation on PRTs and remarked that Lithuania would be standing up a new PRT. As more opportunities evolve, Van Egmond stated, this can be a way for Croatia to get involved. Additionally, he asked whether Croatia was planning to follow up on their offer of sending police trainers to the Jordan international Police Training

Center (JIPTC).

115. (SBU) Biscevic responded that in Croatia there are

post-war sensibilities that must be considered. He remarked that Croatia was ready to consider the police training issue and that Croatia will look at this more seriously as Sanader is planning to visit Jordan in the near term. Noting that Croatia had established diplomatic relations with Iraq two weeks prior, and that in previous times Croatian companies did business in Iraq, Biscevic then asked for U.S. help in having Croatian private companies access that market.

16. (SBU) In concluding remarks, Biscevic stated that Croatia will expand cooperation with the Coalition. When Iraq is more stable, he said, more can happen.

MINISTER OF DEFENSE RONCEVIC

17. (SBU) Mr. Van Egmond led the U.S. delegation in a meeting with Croatia Minister of Defense Berislav Roncevic. Roncevic opened the meeting by discussing his interview in the 25 January edition of Croatian weekly magazine &Nacional8. Roncevic noted that while some of the attributed remarks were &unauthorized8, the most important part) his apology for using &harsh words8 to the President) was published.

18. (SBU) Van Egmond noted that there are likely only two more opportunities for bilateral consultations before NATO,s decision process on accepting new members in 2006 begins) April presentation of the OSD-sponsored Defense Assessment (DA) and the June Bilateral Defense Consultations. Because of this time frame, Van Egmond requested a status update on the Croatian Armed Forces (CAF) Strategic Defense Review (SDR). He remarked that the U.S. would like the SDR and the DA to be complementary reports. Because the decision process will begin soon, we would like to know where Croatia is on defense reform so we can help.

19. (SBU) Roncevic replied that the Croatsians are very close to a finalized draft. According to Roncevic, four of the five phases are complete. The final phase) the General Staff,s proposal for a structure of the Armed Forces) is important because it requires financial verification. This verification has the goal of shaping the CAF into what the Croatsians want: a small and affordable Armed Forces. Affordability, Roncevic asserted, will be based on verified parameters. He continued that if the proposed model is not affordable, cuts will be made. As far as the process itself is concerned, no one in the government has withdrawn from the project. The problems are with the proposed model of organization.

20. (SBU) Van Egmond then turned the conversation to NATO. As the U.S. is willing to help Croatia with NATO accession, it is important that Croatia take a larger role in public relations. Van Egmond noted that public opinion needs work. He remarked that President Mesic has not been helpful in this regard with his recent ambivalence towards NATO membership.

21. (SBU) Roncevic responded that he did not want to comment on the opinion of the President. He stated that with regards to the timing of the next Summit, he will pass the comments and advice to the Prime Minister. Roncevic maintained that NATO accession is as important a goal as getting into the EU. On the subject of public opinion, he replied that the government is aware that those who are in favor of NATO must begin to speak louder and receive more space in the media.

22. (SBU) Van Egmond remarked that there seems to be an impression that the EU and NATO are not complementary organizations: for Croatia the choice is between one or the other. In fact, NATO and the EU are compatible and work together well. It would be helpful if Croatian leaders could provide more perspective to Croatsians on the need to work closely with both the EU and NATO. Roncevic fully agreed but noted that Euro-skeptics get more press in Croatia.

23. (SBU) On Coalition support, Van Egmond thanked Croatia for their continuing contribution to ISAF. He also thanked the Croatsians for looking at ways to expand contact with Iraq and the Iraqi government. He remarked that the U.S. would welcome a contribution of trainers for the Iraqi police in Jordan. He added that Lithuania is looking to stand up a PRT in Afghanistan and asked if Croatia would be interested in

participating.

24. (SBU) Roncevic replied that Croatia will be contacting Turkey about potentially joining a new PRT.

25. (C) The subject then turned to the issue of whether Croatia will maintain air policing as a capability after their defense reform process. Roncevic said that this is a question of when to stop investing in something old and when to get into something newer. Van Egmond asked that this should become a question of what the best way is to use the resources that Croatia has available. Assistant Minister for

Policy, Jelena Grcic-Polic, remarked that while visiting NATO's Defense Section in October, the Croatian delegation was told that NATO would prefer those countries that want to keep the air policing capability to keep the capability. Roncevic added that he has a vision of what is affordable and Croatia will pursue that path.

126. (SBU) In conclusion, both sides looked forward to the upcoming defense assessment and Bilateral Defense Consultations in early summer.

COMMENT

127. (C) The meeting with State Secretary Biscevic covered most of the same ground that Ambassador to the United States, Neven Jurica, relayed to Assistant Secretary of Defense Mira Ricardel on 13 January 2005. The most newsworthy items from the discussion with the State Secretary are the Croatian governments plans to step up a public relations campaign for NATO in the coming weeks and the new effort by the Croatians on an Article 98 agreement.

128. (C) The SDR has now been delayed for a third time and there is chatter that it may be scrapped entirely. On Coalition issues, Roncevic's statement that Croatia will soon contact Turkey on providing for a PRT is promising as Croatia has only recently begun supporting the German PRT in Faizabad. END COMMENT.

129. (U) This message was cleared by OSD Policy.
FRANK

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